

Remarks

The Office Action mailed December 9, 2005 has been carefully reviewed and the foregoing amendment has been made in consequence thereof.

Claims 8-14 and 16-20 are now pending in this application. Claims 8-14 and 16-20 stand rejected. Claim 15 is objected to. Claims 1-7 and 15 have been canceled without prejudice.

The present amendment is intended to place the application in condition for allowance by incorporating subject matter indicated as allowable in the Office Action into independent Claim 8, namely amending Claim 8 to include the recitations of allowable dependent Claim 15. Accordingly, Claim 15 has been canceled. Additionally, the present amendment is intended to place the application in condition for allowance by canceling the non-elected Claims 1-7. Applicant wishes to emphasize that the cancellation of Claims 1-7 is without prejudice, and Applicant reserves the right to file a divisional application or applications to prosecute the subject matter of these claims.

The rejection of Claims 13 and 17-20 under 35 U.S.C. § 112, second paragraph, is respectfully traversed.

Applicant respectfully submits that Claim 13 satisfies Section 112, second paragraph. Claim 13 has been amended to recite a method “according to claim 8, further comprising forming...” Accordingly, Claim 13 satisfies Section 112, second paragraph. For at least these reasons, Applicant respectfully requests that the Section 112, second paragraph rejection of Claim 13 be withdrawn.

The rejection of Claims 17-20 under 35 U.S.C. § 112, second paragraph, is respectfully traversed. Applicant respectfully submits that Claims 17-20 further modify the step from Claim 8 of “providing at least one substantially stretchable reinforcing sleeve.” All of Claims 17-20 include the language “wherein the step of providing at least one substantially stretchable reinforcing sleeve further comprises...” In each of these claims, this step of “providing at least

one substantially stretchable reinforcing sleeve” includes additional language that further describes this step. For at least this reason, Applicant respectfully submits that Claims 17-20 satisfy Section 112, second paragraph.

For at least the reasons set forth above, Applicant respectfully requests that the Section 112, second paragraph rejection of Claims 13 and 17-20 be withdrawn.

The rejection of Claims 8-14 and 16-19 under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Thompson (U.S. Patent No. 2,766,926) in view of Ruggiere, Sr. et al. (U.S. Patent No. 5,772,108) is respectfully traversed.

Claim 8 has been amended to include the recitations of allowable dependent Claim 15. Accordingly, Claim 8 is patentable over Thompson in view of Ruggiere, Sr. et al.

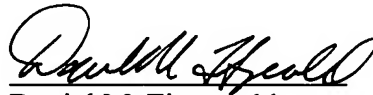
Claims 9-14 and 16-19 depend from independent Claim 8 which is submitted to be in condition for allowance. When the recitations of Claims 9-14 and 16-19 are considered in combination with the recitations of Claim 8, Applicant respectfully submits that dependent Claims 9-14 and 16-19 are also patentable over Thompson in view of Ruggiere, Sr. et al.

For at least the reasons set forth above, Applicant respectfully requests that the rejection of Claims 8-14 and 16-19 be withdrawn.

Claim 15 is objected to as being dependent upon a rejected base claim, but would be allowable if rewritten in independent form including all of the limitations of the base claim and any intervening claims. Applicant has amended Claim 8 to include the recitations of allowable dependent Claim 15. Claim 15 has been canceled. Accordingly, Claims 8-14, and 16-19 are submitted as being patentable.

In view of the foregoing amendments and remarks, all the claims now active in the application are believed to be in condition for allowance. Reconsideration and favorable action is respectfully solicited.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Daniel M. Fitzgerald", written in dark ink.

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